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ABSTRACT

The Council for Industry and Higher Education commissioned a working group called the Widening Participation Group to consider how to make postcompulsory education more accessible to those individuals in the United Kingdom who currently have limited or no exposure to such learning. The group issued a progress report recommending specific actions that might be taken by the following groups: government and its agencies, employers and employer organizations, and higher and further education institutions. Among the actions recommended were the following: give high priority to measures widening participation of those in lower social groups; consider moving to a credit-based funding approach and introducing income-contingent loans; increase pupils' and parents' awareness of the benefits of further and higher education; encourage local learning initiatives; support the introduction of individual learning account; provide student support facilities (child care, transportation, information technology support); and make a range of interim awards and qualifications more widely available. (Appended are the mission of the Widening Participation Group, and a list of group members. Contains 11 references.) (MN)

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ED 414 468

WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

A Progress Report

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July 1997

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WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

A Progress Report

		PAGES
	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i-iii
1	Widening Participation: An Economic And Social Imperative	1
2	The Problem - How And Why We Are Failing	2
3	The Evidence	2
4	The Decision at 16	4
5	Parental and Neighbourhood Influence	5
6	School Influence	6
7	University Application and Entry	7
8	Mature Students	7
9	Regional Differences	7
10	Current Initiatives to Widen Participation in Higher Education	8
11	The Economic Case - The Individual	9
12	The Economic Case - The Nation	9
13	Quality and Quantity	11
14	What Can Be Done - Flexibility And Measures Of Success	11-12
15	What Can Be Done - Funding The Individual	12-13
16	What Can Be Done - Funding The Institutions	13-14
17	What Can Be Done - Local And Regional Initiatives	14-15
18	What Can Be Done - Local Access	15- 16
19	What Can Be Done - Employers	16-18
	a) Recruiting graduates	16-17
	b) Developing employers	17
	c) Linking with their communities	18
	d) Recommendations for employers	18
20	Conclusion	19
	ANNEX 1 The Remit of The Widening Participation Group	
	ANNEX 2 References	

This is a Progress report from the CIHE's Widening Participation Group.

The terms of reference and composition of the Group are given in Annex 1.

CIHE itself attaches great importance to creating a learning nation and considers that a concerted approach is now needed to help everyone in society participate in lifelong learning.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a nation we need better educated people in every walk of life. Our international competitiveness and hence our ability to create new jobs and provide improved living standards and services for everyone rests on our ability to develop and harness new ideas and skills. To do this effectively and comprehensively we need to tap the initiative, inventiveness and inherent capabilities of everyone in society.

We also need to create a more cohesive community in which everyone has an opportunity to contribute and is not alienated or marginalised.

Yet currently there are wide disparities by social groups amongst those who undertake post compulsory education. In particular, this report notes that only about 8% of those from the lowest social groups appear to progress to higher education against around 40% from the highest groups. Even those who achieve degrees or other awards (and the drop-out rates are highest amongst those from lower groups) appear to be somewhat discriminated against by employers both at the stage of recruitment and subsequently in the jobs and wages that may be secured.

The problem of under-representation stems largely from attitudes in schools, amongst parents and in local communities where low aspirations and low self confidence are too common. Financial and other pressures also play their part. Against this background, it has been too easy for those in higher education in particular to ignore the issue or to say that the solution lies elsewhere. However, much can and should be done by higher and further education working together in partnership with schools, and by employer and employer organisations in their local communities. Equally the Government and its agencies need to own the problem and set a framework within which effective and co-ordinated action can be taken and regularly monitored.

Views are sought on the following recommendations:

Government and its Funding and Quality Agencies to:

i. *give high priority to measures which widen participation from those in lower social groups;*

ii. *establish national targets to raise participation levels;*

iii. *encourage further and higher education institutions to set and publish targets for widening participation and relate funding to the achievement of those targets;*

iv. *put in place appropriate funding initiatives to encourage such institutions to widen participation including from lower social groups;*

v. *consider moving to a credit based funding approach; a national system of credit accumulation and transfer is urgently needed;*

vi. *encourage broadly based regional and local partnerships to develop lifelong learning action plans as part of their economic development strategies; such partnerships should have access to funding from existing DfEE, DTI, TEC and FE/HE Funding Council budgets to help them implement these plans;*

vii. *help ensure that schools make pupils and parents aware of the benefits of further and higher education in terms of better employment and earnings prospects;*

viii. *establish bursaries or other measures of financial support to help those from the poorest backgrounds meet the costs of engaging in lifelong learning;*

ix. *introduce income-contingent loans and individual learning accounts to give students the flexibility to relate their continuing education to their own domestic and financial circumstances; and*

x. *be prepared to increase the number of institutions accorded university status if the recommendations and incentives outlined above do not result in widened participation.*

Employers and Employer Organisations to:

i. *examine their recruitment processes to ensure there is no discrimination against students from lower social groups, newer universities or with qualifications other than A-levels;*

ii. *recognise the value of interim awards and qualifications (ie. those below degree level) in their recruitment and promotion practices;*

iii. *raise awareness amongst employees that learning pays and link earning and learning so that individuals are encouraged to adopt a positive approach to personal development;*

iv. *undertake regular skills audits of their employees and establish appropriate policies and practices to support and guide all employees to engage in lifelong learning;*

v. *make available their own learning facilities to the community as local learning centres;*

vi. *encourage local learning initiatives (including via TECs and Regional Development Agencies);*

vii. *support the introduction of individual learning accounts and the development of the University for Industry; and*

viii. *be prepared to exercise choice and associated financial influence with HE and FE institutions with whom they do business (both for teaching and learning and research and development) where institutions do not pursue widening participation objectives.*

Others, such as employer organisations and trade unions, also have important roles in making the case for improved training, skills and personal development to their own members as well as lobbying for action on the part of others.

Higher Education and Further Education Institutions to:

i. *set widening participation objectives and monitor their performance against those targets;*

ii. *network closer with schools, community groups, local employers and others (eg. TECs) so as to raise awareness of provision, offer improved advice and counselling and be more aware of local needs and hence opportunities for widening participation and generating additional business;*

iii. *develop appropriate continuing professional development courses and other training products to meet local demand;*

iv. *provide appropriate student support facilities (child care, transport, IT support);*

v. *make better use of all the potential learning facilities available in the community (libraries, schools, employer premises etc.) including the wider exploitation of information technology, so that learning can be delivered and supported locally;*

vi. *make more widely available a range of interim awards and qualifications; work collaboratively to establish a national system of credit accumulation and transfer to improve access to courses and progression between levels of learning;*

vii. *examine how they can help students to communicate better the value of their qualifications and experience; and*

viii. *assemble, disseminate and keep under regular review examples of good practice which achieve demonstrable results in widening participation.*

It is only through a concerted drive to attract everyone into lifelong learning that the capabilities of all individuals can be better realised, the wealth and job creating potential of the nation achieved and a more cohesive society developed. We look in particular to the Government to set a policy framework within which all can work to a common goal.

We encourage wide discussion on this progress report and these recommendations in particular so that a consensus on future action can be developed.

CIHE Widening Participation Group
July 1997

WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

A Progress Report From a CIHE Working Group

1 Widening Participation: An Economic and Social Imperative

Our economic future and hence our ability to continue to provide improved living standards and services for all depends on our ability continuously to add value to goods and services. The more thoughtful employers now look to individuals throughout their organisations to come forward with ideas for improving the way the business performs, to take greater responsibility for their area of work, for personal development and for initiating with others new ways of doing things.

Gone are the days when organisations thought they could rely on an educated elite to "lead" whilst others merely "followed". They now recognise that they have to make the best possible use of all available talent if they are to compete successfully in rapidly changing global markets. Harnessing all available brain power is vital for economic survival and success.

We also need to develop a more cohesive society with a broader understanding and respect for all individuals (and not just in our own country) and so ensure that everyone can contribute rather than be marginalised or alienated.

Post compulsory education has a major role to play in helping to achieve these objectives. So have companies and other employers, the Government and its agencies and all of us that can in any way help initiate change. We all have a role in pressing for equality of opportunity and access to learning for those who wish to benefit. The nation needs better educated people in every walk of life to achieve its economic potential and greater social harmony.

As this progress report shows, we are currently failing to achieve these aims. Too few people from lower social groups are attracted into higher or further education, hence we are not raising to a sufficiently high level the skills, wealth and job creating capabilities of the nation. CIHE views this as a "business failure" on the part of all of us: Government, businesses, educational institutions and other organisations. The situation can only be changed by concerted action by all these partners. This report aims to stimulate debate on some of the actions which we recommend should be taken.

2 The Problem - How And Why We Are Failing

There is now clear evidence that people from lower social groups are less likely than those from middle and upper groups to:

- apply to university or other higher education institutions, even when they have identical or similar educational performance; and

- be accepted by a university.[1]

This is partly because higher education has a bias towards those with A-levels; yet those from lower social groups are less likely to:

- study for A-levels (and where they continue with education post-16 are more likely to pursue vocational courses); and

- perform as well in their A-level exams.

There is also evidence that :

- students from certain geographical areas, most notably the South East of England are well represented but others, particularly from Merseyside, are under-represented in university entry, even after allowing for social group differences;

- women now form the majority of university entrants, and it appears that gender is no longer an issue on entry; and

- those from ethnic minorities are generally well represented in university but certain groups, most notably Afro-Caribbean men and Bangladeshi women, are under-represented.

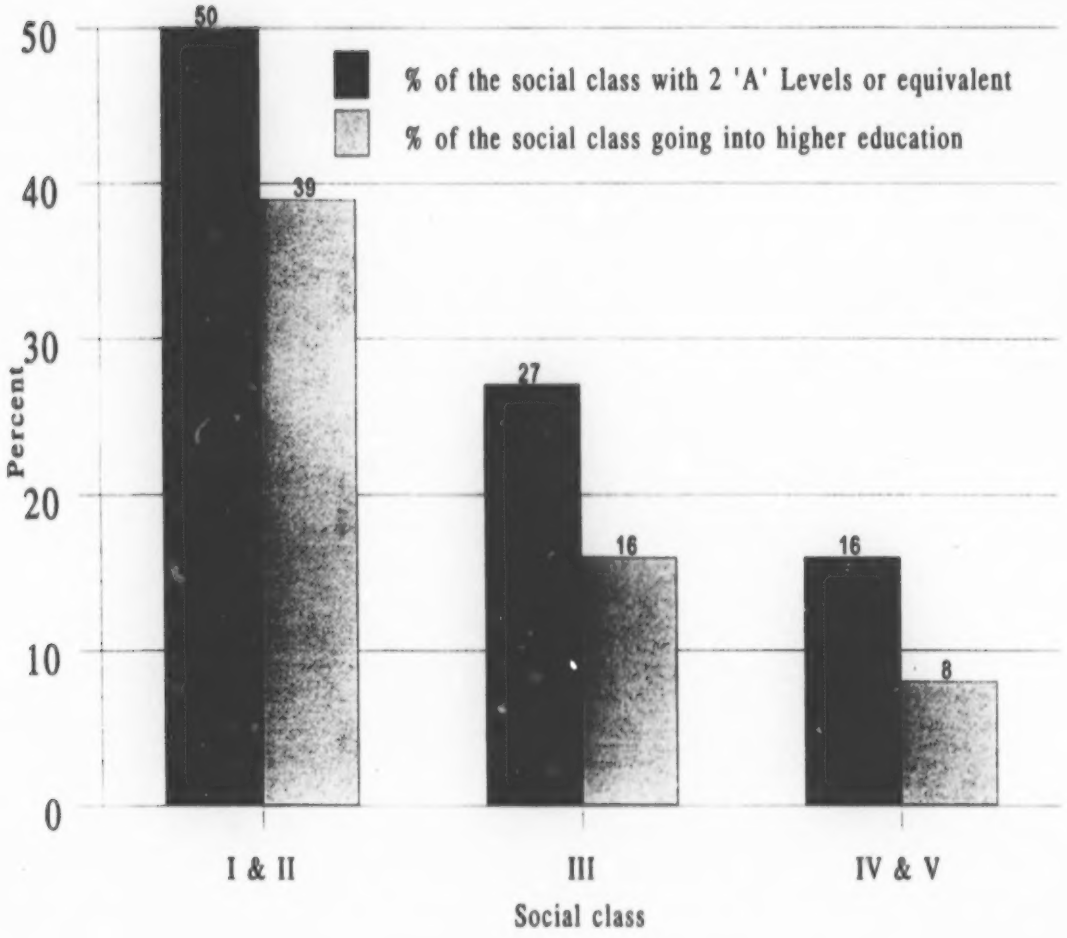
3 The Evidence

Work carried out for the Widening Participation Group by Hilary Metcalf of the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) is published simultaneously with this report. It shows that, according to the 1993 Youth Cohort Survey, only 8% of young people from the lower social groups go to university, while for middle and higher groups the figures are 16% and 39% respectively (see Chart 1). Even for those with the minimum entry requirements of two A-levels or equivalent qualifications or better, a much smaller proportion (50%) of those from lower social groups go to university than of those from middle and higher social groups, (60% and 77% respectively).

[1]However, data on the socio-economic profile of those in higher education have consistently been poor ... There is no simple way to draw a conclusive picture especially as no relevant data on students over 21 exists", *Widening Access to HE*, 1996, HEFCE.

CHART 1

Qualification, achievement and participation in higher education
18-19 year olds, 1993



I & II: professional, managerial and technical
III: other non-manual and skilled manual
IV & V: semi-skilled and unskilled manual

Source: Youth Cohort Survey, 1993 (Cohort 5, Sweep 3).

4 The Decision at 16

16 year-olds have to decide, in consultation with their parents and schools, whether to continue in education and what they are going to study when they leave compulsory education. This is a critical decision and impacts on the likelihood of their going to university.

The A-level route has been the traditional method of entry to university. Young people with A-levels are generally much more likely to go to university (82%) than those with A-level equivalent qualifications (30%). However, the A-level route is narrow and academic rather than broadly based and practical in its approach and is not necessarily suited to the culture of the schools or students in lower social group areas.

Hence around half of those from lower social groups who are qualified at the 18+ level have A-level equivalent or vocational rather than A-level qualifications. The proportions of those from middle and higher social groups so qualified are much lower at 37% and 18% respectively. The bias towards A-level entry is a bias against those from lower social groups.

Even those who study for A-levels and complete the course are less likely (50%) to go to university than those from middle and upper social groups (78% and 86% respectively).

Overall, as the accompanying table suggests, over 50% of those from the highest social group obtain some higher education qualification compared with only 12% in the lowest social group. More generally, it appears that the staying-on rate beyond compulsory education for lower social groups remains lower even where educational achievements are similar (Chart 2).

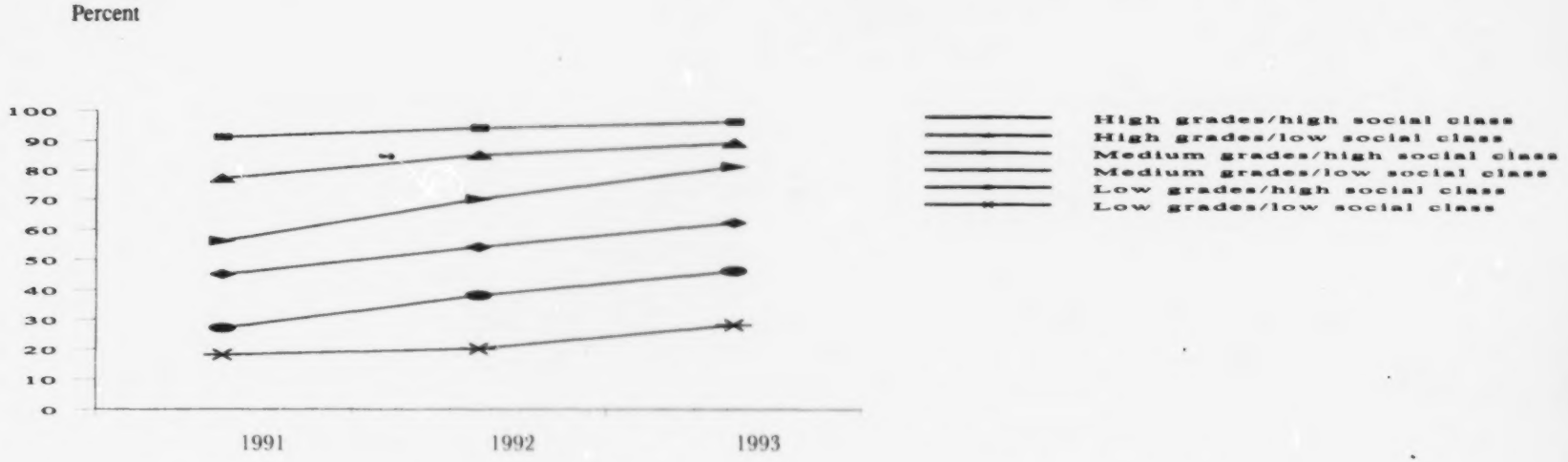
This all suggests a cumulative disadvantage, with young people from lower social groups less likely than others to pursue and complete qualifications which lead traditionally to university entry, and even where they do, they are less likely to attend university or complete their course.

Qualification by Social Socio-Economic Group

Qualification	1	11	111n	111m	IV	V
Higher Degree	6.8	4	2	0.6	0.2	0.6
1st Degree	19.9	13.5	7.8	3.2	1.3	1.7
HE Diploma	6.8	3.1	1.5	0.7	0.4	0.6
Intermediate	4.2	3.5	4.4	1.6	1.8	1.1
Other Professional	12.6	14	12.5	10.3	7.2	8.1
Lower level/none	49.7	61.9	71.8	83.6	87.6	88
TOTAL	100		100	100	100	100

Source: Institute for Employment Research, Report for HEFCE, April 1997.

Staying on rates by parental social class and year 11 GCSE grades



Source: Payne, J. (1995) *Routes beyond compulsory schooling.* ED Research Series, Youth Cohort Report No. 31. London: Employment Department.

CHART 2

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5 Parental and Neighbourhood Influence

Parental education and expectations are a major influence, but participation is also affected by the outlook of schools, the expectations which they have of their pupils, and neighbourhood aspirations. Peer group pressures and financial needs also affect participation.

These findings are generally confirmed by a recent study undertaken on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), made available to the Group, which found that those from the most affluent quartile of neighbourhoods were between four and five times as likely to attend university as those from the least affluent quartile.

6 School Influence

Low levels of participation in higher education result in part from, and reflect the cultures within schools. Many schools are not sufficiently strong in communicating opportunities in higher education and the courses which their pupils need to follow post-16 in order to optimise their chances. In addition there may be some stereotyping within and across schools.

Within many schools, there appears to be limited and only rather unco-ordinated information available to students who follow more vocational courses about the options and possibilities available at a university. This limited awareness of higher education opportunities, particularly in continuing vocational courses, leads to fewer of those from lower social groups applying to university.

Information from the HEFCE study, and borne out in broader terms by PSI, suggests that a much greater number of young people would be able to participate in higher education if they had the confidence and information to pursue their education between ages 16 and 18 with university as an option in mind.

There is a much greater probability that young people from lower social groups will undertake GNVQ and BTEC courses rather than A-levels, largely because such young people are more immediately career orientated. Schools and pupils are less likely to see these qualifications leading into higher education. In turn universities tend to find many vocational courses less acceptable as an entry qualification.

7 University Application and Entry

The PSI study, which is based on 1993 data, suggests that young people from lower social groups with two A-levels or equivalent are much less likely (50%) to apply for a higher education course than those from higher social groups (84%), even when they have similar qualifications. Furthermore, even when differences in A-level performance by grade, ethnicity, type of school and other factors are taken into account, applicants from non-manual, skilled manual, semi-skilled and unskilled backgrounds were less likely to be offered a university place than those from professional and managerial backgrounds.

There appears to be some systemic bias (deliberate or unintentional) in the process of university entry. This is compounded by the lower success rate of applicants from non-selective schools compared with those with similar qualifications from selective (including independent) schools. Applicants from Further Education Colleges are least likely to gain a place.

8 Mature Students

There is little evidence that the patterns of participation described above for young entrants are reversed for mature entrants, although it does appear that the disparities of social class amongst mature students are a little less marked. Further work is needed in this area and CIHE will undertake further analysis.

9 Regional Differences

There are significant regional differences in participation rates, even after allowing for the relative affluence of neighbourhoods of origin. The HEFCE study suggested that even after a "neighbourhood affluence" adjustment, participation in higher education of those in the survey group in the South East is about 6% above what might otherwise have been predicted, while for Merseyside the actual participation rate is over 5% below the predicted level. Women have an equal or slightly higher participation rate than men in all areas except Yorkshire and Humberside where it is fractionally lower.

This does not seem to reflect proximity to a higher education institution. The Highlands and Islands of Scotland has one of the highest participation rates in the UK at 49%, yet currently it has no university (apart from the all-reaching Open University). Participation rates in Glasgow however at 15% and in inner Liverpool of between .2% and 3.5% exist despite the proximity of "old" and "new" universities.

10 Current Initiatives to Widen Participation in Higher Education

There are a number of initiatives which universities have taken in order to encourage wider participation. These have included links with local schools and further education colleges, provision of GCSE and A-level support to pupils of local schools, study weekends or weeks for sixth-formers, provision of child care facilities, evening tuition and many others. These initiatives have helped to secure progression from local communities to local universities at a time when many institutions must look to capture much of their market from the local community.

HEFCE is currently supporting an initiative to widen participation (a total of £3m per annum for four years). Forty-five projects are being supported. They include a wide range of activities to encourage under-represented groups to participate in higher education.

The impression remains, however, that whilst many universities embrace the idea of widening participation with enthusiasm, there are others with a more limited commitment. The report for CIHE, *Trends in Higher Education*, (1996), notes the differences between 1986 and 1993 and between pre and post 1992 universities with the "old" universities having, if anything, reduced their percentage intake of students from lower social groups, and the overall university average having only increased because of the inclusion of the "new" universities. A range of commitments will remain unless there are significant funding or other incentives.

Indeed for so long as league tables encourage the assumption that "success" by a university should be equated with completion rates and the class of honours degree achieved rather than with measures of added value, there will always be a temptation for institutions to play safe and recruit from sectors of the community least likely to drop out of courses or achieve lower attainment levels. For the Further Education sector where institutional funding is more related to successful completion than it is for higher education, the pressures to play safe must be even greater. Positive funding to encourage wider access is needed. We return to this later.

In order to help the process of developing good practices, CIHE in partnership with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) plans to commission research to identify examples of good practice where there have been demonstrable results, and disseminate these more widely throughout the sector.

11 The Economic Case - The Individual

Recent work undertaken by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), the University of Birmingham, and the Institute for Employment Research (IER), confirms earlier work that the economic case for studying for and achieving a degree level qualification is strong. The IFS estimated that earnings throughout a career are likely to be 17% higher for males and 36% higher for females relative to those with equivalent pre-entry qualifications. Chart 3 well summarises the comparison of weekly earnings against qualification.

While current earnings differentials are likely to reduce as the numbers with higher education qualifications in the workforce increases, it appears that employers do value graduates and are willing to pay a premium. Income foregone on leaving compulsory education is more than made up in later life. This argument needs to be deployed with vigour by the Government, employers and all involved in advancing the cause of learning.

Those from lower social groups tend, however, to be more focused on short-term earnings. Here the wage differences may well be narrower. Priorities and pressures are also different and the desire for immediate financial independence is greater.

Perceptions can be just as important as reality. Fears about future unemployment or underemployment, less confidence in the future and in one's own ability to command higher salaries and lack of family and peer group experience in foregoing current income, all influence an individual's decision. We return later to suggest how funding mechanisms might support continued learning.

12 The Economic Case - The Nation

> *"Higher education should be available to all who have the necessary competence and who might wish to benefit from it. The nation needs more highly educated people in every walk of life. Higher and further education have a major role to play in the seamless delivery of lifelong learning which will not only improve international competitiveness and hence individual prosperity, but also make for a more civilised and caring society." (CIHE, 1996)*

The current low participation levels from certain segments of society are a waste of economic potential at the national, local, and personal level, and act against social cohesion and social justice. It is a problem which has been known to exist for many years but which has had an unacceptably low profile. Neither Government, universities, nor employer organisations have seen it to be sufficiently in their interest to address the issue as a high priority.

Gross Weekly Earnings by Highest Qualification Level and Sex

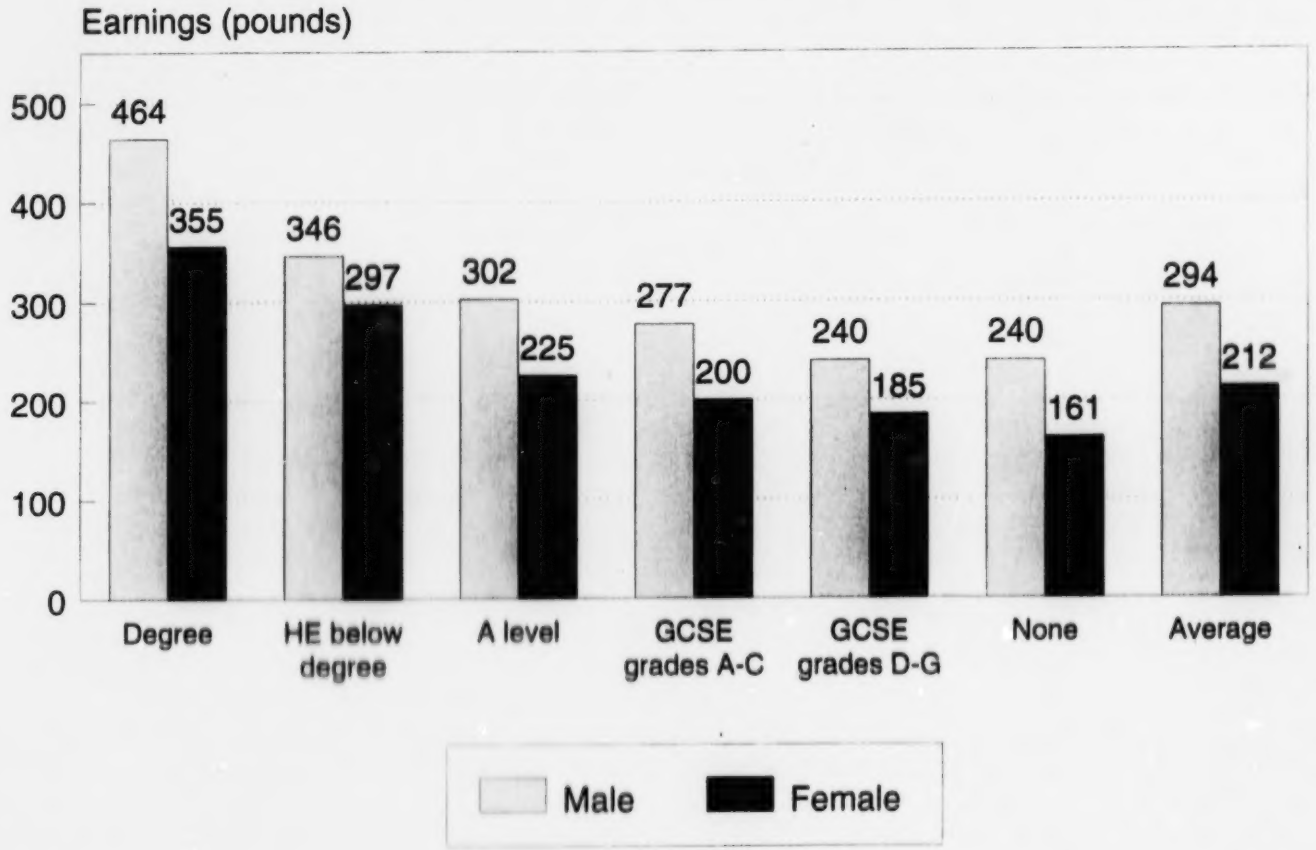

CHART 3

13 Quality And Quantity

It is important to break the myth that "more means worse". At the time of the Robbins Report there was much concern that in expanding the student intake, quality would be compromised, and yet the expansion which followed still resulted in a participation rate of less than 10%. The current rate is around 30%, but considerably more in Scotland and in certain other countries around the world, *(Trends in Higher Education,* 1996), shows how there has been a steady relationship between applications and acceptances for higher education places. As the numbers being accepted have risen, so have the number of applicants. The nation's overall desire for high-level learning thus appears very strong. The task is to encourage and satisfy a similar desire across all sectors of the community. As the nation develops, so do perceptions and needs. There is no inherent barrier (other than funding) to very high participation rates.

The HEFCE study indicates that if youth participation rates for those from lower social groups were brought up to 30%, the current overall average, then there would be another 35,000 young entrants per year in England alone. Overall funding provision will need to reflect that.

14 What Can Be Done - Flexibility And Measures Of Success

In addition to the desire to improve income, potential students from lower social groups often undertake higher education courses to improve their self-confidence. The Institute for Employment Research found that twice as many students from semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds gave this as a relevant consideration than did students from managerial and professional backgrounds.

Learning enriches one's life and expands horizons, this is also an important motivator, perhaps particularly for those studying at the Open University for example.

For others, ease of entry and exit into and out of further and higher education is a key issue, whether this is to link with their domestic, financial circumstances or career needs. Interim awards, which should be seen as badges of success rather than measures of failure and which enable the qualified to enter the labour market with advantage, need therefore to be further encouraged. They should be regarded by more institutions and by employers as significant steps along the road of lifelong learning. Greater recognition and accreditation of prior learning would also encourage this step-by-step approach.

Funding should fully reflect this philosophy. As we noted above, universities and FE colleges tend to be regarded as having poor performance if students do not complete the course through to final year qualification. It may well be the case,

however, that a student does not complete a course because increased capability has resulted in a job offer or a promotion from an employer. Alternatively he/she may be unable to continue the course immediately but may return at a later date. Others may study for the sheer pleasure and be put off by the pressure of final exams. We need to encourage the view that all learning is valuable and to make it easier for everyone to dip in and out of lifelong learning. We need clearer pathways of progression, a more seamless system of higher and further education and clear marks of success along the road.

We recommend that:

- **Government and the Funding Councils should consider moving to a credit based funding approach and work with the sector to establish a national system of credit accumulation and transfer to improve access to courses and progression between levels of learning; and**

- **higher education institutions and FE colleges make more widely available a range of interim awards and qualifications and work collaboratively to establish a national system of credit accumulation and transfer.**

15 What Can Be Done - Funding The Individual

Financial commitment is an issue for many students from low income backgrounds. Although it can be shown that continuing education is a good investment, many such potential students do not have the luxury of planning for the longer term. They see their friends earning money there and then, and are not willing to be socially excluded from their immediate social circle. Running up debts as well as foregoing income does not seem like a credible option. Furthermore, the perception of income contingent loans may be that of a mortgage but with no saleable asset, and no income with which to repay it.

Since students from lower social groups tend to be older on entry, they are more likely to have family and other commitments. They also have lower levels of savings and other support yet higher levels of essential expenditure including on housing and child care. A 1996 PSI study shows that as a result those from lower social groups are more financially disadvantaged than those from higher and usually more wealthy backgrounds.

We recommend that:

- **the Government ensures there are bursaries or other forms of financial support for those from low income backgrounds to meet the of FE courses, and full and part-time HE courses irrespective of age and decisions that might be made on whether students should bear a part of their tuition fees.**

We also support early moves to establish a system of individual learning accounts (ILAs) in so far as these should incorporate contributions and commitments from

employers and the state as well as individuals. They provide an added incentive for individuals to pursue learning and place decision-making more in the hands of those individuals. Many CIHE member companies have considerable experience of operating employer development programmes such as EDAP which have encouraged a thirst for learning. CIHE's financial institution members also have relevant expertise. This could be immensely valuable and should be tapped. CIHE has said it is willing to help make ILAs a reality.

16 What Can Be Done - Funding The Institutions

The overall lack of funding incentives to widen participation is in stark contrast to the multi-million pound funding which encourages higher education institutions to undertake research, thereby sometimes diverting the missions of institutions away from teaching, learning and local economic development. Without a rebalancing of funding incentives it is not obvious why institutions should make the effort to widen participation, especially since it probably costs more for example to attract students from lower social groups.

The Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW), however, does provide a specific funding incentive to encourage Further Education Colleges to widen participation. This is achieved by allocating additional points, called Widening Participation Units (WPUs), which recognise both the additional recruitment cost and the higher support costs relating to students from deprived backgrounds. WPUs are given to each further education institution in respect of students residing in particular postcodes whose level of social and economic deprivation is measured using census information provided by the Welsh Office.

For 1996/7, the WPU element can amount to anything from zero to around 6% of the total grant received by the further education institution, but a much higher marginal rate in respect of the socially or economically deprived students. It is believed by many principals of Welsh FE colleges that many thousands of additional students have been brought into further education as a result of this funding incentive. The Welsh model may not be entirely applicable but at least warrants evaluation.

The Government can send important signals. If it seeks to widen participation in further and higher education then it should encourage the Funding Councils to use their funding to provide appropriate financial incentives.

It may also wish to show the importance of the issue by setting national targets for participation by those from lower social groups in both higher and further education. (It would then need to improve the collection of information to monitor achievement - a necessary objective in its own right). It could also encourage institutions to set and make explicit their own targets.

The Government may wish to widen the number of institutions entitled to university status if the sector does not achieve a widening in participation. Many private sector organisations are developing their own socially inclusive "universities" which might play a significant role in helping to achieve a learning nation.

There has been little development of the concept of value added in the HE and FE context. This is however informing school league tables and it may be worth further consideration.

Higher participation from lower social groups will only be achieved by a mixture of macro and micro policies applied within a coherent and consistent policy framework set by Government.

We recommend that the Government should:

- **set national targets for widening participation;**
- **encourage, through the funding councils, it should require universities and colleges to set and publish their own targets on widening participation and, invite the funding and quality councils to monitor performance against those targets;**
- **put in place appropriate funding initiatives to encourage such institutions to widen participation by lower social groups; and**
- **be prepared to widen the number of institutions entitled to university status if that proves necessary to widen participation.**

17 What Can Be Done - Local And Regional Initiatives

CIHE has argued elsewhere that broadly based local and regional partnerships should develop local lifelong learning action plans in support of their economic development strategies. Funding from existing but separate DfEE, DTI, TEC, HE and FE Funding Council resources augmented by EU funds should be better co-ordinated. Such funding partners might agree at the regional and local level through the Regional Development Agency (RDA) how to support such learning plans. It will be important for partnerships to build on existing relationships.

If such funds totalled £10 - 15 million on average per English region, this might provide a sufficient counterweight (at least initially) to the current focus on marginal research funding and induce a reappraisal, at least by some, of their institutional missions. Some would no doubt refocus and others reinforce their emphasis on their local communities, on widening access and on supporting local economic development, local SMEs, continuing professional development (CPD) and vocational education (CVE).

Higher education institutions have diverse missions and rightly operate on the international, national and local stage. Such diversity is a strength of the UK system and should be encouraged. Not all institutions will want to embrace the local

dimension and the Government or Funding Councils will not want to try and press all into a common mould. The Government and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) may, however, want to be satisfied that at the regional or sub-regional level institutions have agreed in partnership how the objective of meeting local needs and supporting wider access can best be achieved. The partnership arrangements should include Further Education Colleges in the seamless provision of lifelong learning for all.

We recommend that:

- **broadly based regional and local partnerships develop lifelong learning action plans supported by budgets drawn from existing but often disparate and unco-ordinated sources.**

18 What Can Be Done - Local Access

Many individuals from lower social groups may have insufficient personal confidence to apply to a university. They may have concerns about the entry process and about whether they will fit in socially once they have entered. Universities may seem to them to be remote and rather daunting institutions, culturally, socially and geographically.

In physical terms this is certainly an issue in many parts of the UK. Access is not an issue just for the inner city dweller; there are large areas of the UK where there are currently no universities. In other areas universities cannot easily be accessed especially by part-time students, single parents or others without their own transport.

There are opportunities, however, to localise access via closer links with further education. FE colleges can be outreach stations for the delivery of at least the initial part of a degree level qualification. Closer networking with schools can also raise awareness while improved links with employers could raise the potential for continuing professional development (CPD) and other courses.

Further education colleges already provide foundation courses for university entry, and are particularly geared towards vocational qualifications which are likely to be more attractive to some as pathways. Modular and credit building approaches as recommended earlier would ease progress along this pathway.

Institutions of further and higher education will want to examine:

- how they can develop closer institutional partnerships to facilitate easier access as well as a more seamless transition for individuals;

- developing closer links with particular schools in deprived areas, with a view to widening awareness on future options and facilitating transition between the various stages of learning;

- how education partnerships might most effectively link in to the proposed University for Industry, TECs/LECs, Business Links, the Chambers of Commerce, and other agencies, so that learning opportunities and needs can be better appreciated; and

- the role of IT and supported remote learning in facilitating learning being brought closer to the learner.

Government and the Funding Councils have a part to play in encouraging and facilitating this process of regional and local partnership, but local leadership and ownership has to come from the universities and further education colleges themselves. Increased co-operation to meet the wider needs of society must go hand in hand with competition for students and funds.

We recommend that HE and FE institutions should:

- **develop closer partnerships, building on and disseminating examples of current good practice; and**

- **network more closely with schools and others in the community to raise awareness of what is available, offer improved advice and become more aware of local opportunities including for CPD.**

19 What Can Be Done - Employers

a) Recruiting graduates

There is some evidence that employers are less inclined to recruit graduates from lower social groups than those from the middle and upper groups. The IER study already quoted notes that compared with graduates from traditional backgrounds, those from manual backgrounds were more likely to be employed in clerical and secretarial positions and in jobs which did not specify a degree as a requirement. Their salaries were also more likely to be skewed towards the lower end with a greater tendency for these graduates to report that their salary was less or a lot less than they had expected.

Given the financial pressures on such students which we have noted above, this could be a serious impediment to engagement in higher education. Overall, the data reveals that the undergraduate experiences of students from other manual worker households were broadly the same as those of students from other backgrounds whilst at university. Although the differences are not marked, the evidence nevertheless suggests that once they are in the job market, students from manual worker backgrounds have a less favourable transition to employment.

CIHE is planning to undertake further analysis of the recruitment practices and procedures of employers. It is clearly important if access is to be increased that prospective students from lower social groups have some assurance that they will be treated on a par with those from middle and higher social groups.

If employers when they recruit graduates, are paying undue regard to A-level scores, confining their intake to a limited number of universities or recruiting on the basis of whether the university was a pre or post 1992 institution (as has been suggested in Professor Lee Harvey's report, *Graduates' Work*, then they could well be discriminating perhaps unwittingly against students from lower social groups who have not progressed via the A-level route and who may have gone to a post 1992 local university. Higher education institutions could help students and employers by enabling students to communicate better the value of their qualifications and experience. CIHE is working with the Quality Assurance Agency, AgCAS and others to provide an employer perspective on attempts to improve how relevant experience and qualifications are communicated.

If employers value work experience as much as they say, then this should often give more mature or part-time students an advantage. Where non-recruitment reflects weaknesses in social and presentation skills, then again higher education institutions could do much to help students develop and demonstrate the high level key skills employers say they want.

b) Developing employees

Employers will also want to harness and develop the skills and capabilities of all employees. Not all know what skills individual employees currently possess. A skills audit would improve their understanding. It may as a result enable certain prior learning to be accredited and additional capabilities developed in the workplace. The notion that the only valuable forms of learning take place in academic institutions must be discarded.

Many employers encourage a culture of continuous learning and individual motivation towards learning via schemes such as EDAP. Many CIHE member companies are leaders in their commitment towards total employee involvement in lifelong learning and hence in releasing and developing the potential that can lie dormant in too many companies. Helping people to help themselves and realise their potential should be an objective of all organisations in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

c) Linking with their communities

Many organisations reach into deprived communities through a variety of schemes and initiatives. They will want to see that imparting an enthusiasm for learning is an element in their community plans.

The nation needs to develop communities of learning via partnerships between regional and local learning institutions, employers and local communities. Where employers have training centres, they could often make them more available as local learning resource centres. These could play their part in the network that ultimately could be part of the University for Industry. CIHE should help harness the resources, experience and advice of its members to help make the UFI a reality.

Making learning available locally at times and in places and in a form which suits individuals will be the key to reaching across communities and enabling all to embrace the vision of creating lifelong learning individuals, organisations, communities and a learning nation.

d) Recommendations for employers

We recommend that:

- **employers should review their recruitment processes and procedures to ensure there is no unintended social bias;**
- **higher education institutions should examine how they can help students better communicate their learning experiences and capabilities;**
- **employers should undertake skills audits and raise awareness amongst their own employees and in the communities in which they operate that learning pays; they should establish measures which support and guide employees to engage in lifelong learning;**
- **employers should make available their own learning centres and other resources to the community.**

20 Conclusion

CIHE is uniquely well placed as a partnership organisation embracing higher and further education and employers both to contribute to the debate on widening participation and to effect change. Only through a concerted partnership can the nation develop and realise the potential of everyone. Only then can we raise our economic performance and create more wealth, more jobs and higher standards of living for all. Only by partnership action can we reduce the learning inequalities which currently exist and help bring about a more cohesive society.

The Widening Participation Group therefore encourages the Government to:

- **give high priority to measures which widen participation;**
- **set a policy framework within which all can work to a common goal; and**
- **consider and discuss widely the recommendations set out in this progress report.**

We encourage CIHE constituent members and others in higher and further education, in companies and in other organisations to:

- **consider this report and the recommendations as they may apply to them; and**
- **respond positively to this invitation for consultation to help inform the debate and develop a consensus on future actions. Written responses should be sent to the CIHE by Tuesday 30th, September.**

THE REMIT OF THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION GROUP

The Widening Participation Group was established early in 1997 to consider how access to post compulsory education might be increased from those individuals who currently have limited or no exposure to such learning. The aim was to identify what roles CIHE and others should play in furthering the objective of wider participation.

The work focused on those from lower social groups. We have not focused on the disabled or on those from minority ethnic backgrounds where other research work has already been undertaken.

The Group is chaired by Professor Clive Booth, Pro-Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University. The membership is drawn primarily from business, further and higher education. A list of the members is attached.

We have also had the benefit of advice and participation from others such as Helena Kennedy QC, who has recently published a report focused on the further education sector, *Learning Works*, FEFC, June 1997.

This progress report complements that from her Committee. It recommends specific actions which might be taken notably by:

- Government and its agencies;
- employer and employer organisations; and
- higher and further education institutions.

The Widening Participation Group will:

- initiate with others further work (including on current good practice);
- take account of additional views in developing an action agenda;
- press for early and substantive action; and
- monitor progress.

Observations and suggestions should be sent to:

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Further copies of this report are available from CIHE.

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Recent publications

Helping Students Towards Success at Work: A declaration of intent
Twelve organisations declare their intent to take part in a national effort towards the common goal of seeing that those in higher education are enabled to develop attributes thought useful for success in employment and future life.
The Employment Skills Overview Group (ESOG), January 1996.

Colleges and Companies: Sharing Great Expectations
Draws on Research by the Institute for Employment Studies on how colleges/employer relations stand today, what sorts of interaction seem fruitful for the future and what may hinder it.
CIHE, January 1996.

Paying for Education Beyond Eighteen: An Examination of Issues and Options
Notes the resources available for the funding of higher education and how this might more equitably be distributed.
Professor Gareth Williams, Centre for Higher Education Studies, The Institute of Education, University of London for CIHE, Spring 1996.

Resources for Higher Education in OECD Countries
Notes the comparative position of the UK on various indices, with detailed case studies on four countries.
Professor Gareth Williams, Centre for Higher Education Studies, The Institute of Education, University of London, for CIHE, December 1996.

A Learning Nation
The Council's policy document and submission to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, CIHE, November 1996.

Trends in Higher Education
This report notes the major changes over the last ten years. It seeks to inform the debate on the future of higher education and the policy implications.
Professor Alan Smithers and Dr Pamela Robinson for CIHE, November 1996.

Humanities Graduates and the World of Work
Notes the employability of arts and humanities students, case studies on work experience and what more might be done to help employability.
Council of University Deans of Arts and Humanities (CUDAH) and CIHE, June 1997.

SMEs and Higher Education: A Framework for Future Policy
Report from a Task Force on how SMEs and higher education might better work together to increase national wealth creation and jobs. CIHE, July 1997.

Class and Higher Education: The participation of young people from lower social groups
Analysis of available research work for CIHE's Widening Participation Group. Metcalf, Hilary, Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and CIHE, July 1997.

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